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Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently amended) A method comprising imaging a characteristic size of a defective region of a data storage medium by combining a plurality of data readback signals received from different tracks adjacent the defective region, and indicating that the defective region is unreliable if a ratio defined by a size of a portion of the defective region with a less-than-expected readback signal strength compared to a total size of the defective region is greater than a preselected threshold.

2. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 further comprising categorizing the defective region by comparing the characteristic size of the defective region to a plurality of predefined category profiles.

Claim 3 (Cancelled)

4. (Previously presented) The method of claim 2 wherein the categorizing step comprises identifying the defective region as likely being characteristic of a scratch.

Claims 5-7 (Cancelled)

8. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the imaging step comprises representing an array of data points each having independent coordinates X and Y with respect to the data storage media.

9. (Previously presented) The method of claim 8 wherein the imaging step comprises representing an array of data points wherein each X and Y coordinate is associated with a corresponding Z coordinate relating to a strength of the associated readback signal.

10. (Previously presented) The method of claim 2 wherein the categorizing step comprises identifying the defective region as likely being characteristic of corrosion.

11. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising:
modifying a list of bad sectors in a manner that depends upon the imaging step;
and
retaining the modified list in a memory.

12. (Previously presented) A data storage apparatus comprising a list of bad sectors that is modified according to the method of claim 11 and stored in a memory.

13. (Previously presented) The method of claim 2, further comprising:
assigning a value to each of the defective regions according to the categorizing step; and
reworking the data storage medium if an aggregation of the assigned values exceeds a predetermined threshold.

Claims 14-16 (Cancelled)

17. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 in which the imaging step comprises receiving all of the plurality of readback signals from a transducer head of a sealed data storage apparatus in which the medium is rotated.

Claims 18-24 (Cancelled)

25. (Previously presented) An apparatus comprising:
a data storage medium comprising a defective region; and
means for assigning a category for the defective region by combining a plurality of data readback signals received from different tracks adjacent the defective region, wherein the means for assigning comprises means for generating a topographical image of the defective region of the media surface.

26. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 25 in which the means for assigning comprises defining a profile for each of at least 3 categories defining a set that includes the category assigned for the defective region.

27. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 25 in which the means for assigning is completed while the combination of readback signals has been compared against at most 30 profiles each corresponding to a respective category, the assigned category being one of the respective categories.

28. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 25 in which the means for assigning comprises a category identifier indicating whether the defective region is likely to contain a scratch.

Claim 29 (Cancelled).

30. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 25 in which the means for assigning is configured to receive all of the plurality of read signals from the transducer head while the media storage and transducer head are sealed in a substantially opaque chamber.

31. (Previously presented) The method of claim 4 wherein the categorizing step identifies the defective region as likely being characteristic of a scratch if the characteristic size comprises a length that is greater than a width by a factor of about 2.5.

Claims 32-43 (Cancelled).